

Today is January 2, 1990. I'm here to interview Mr. Anton Berkovits who's a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust. I'm doing this under the auspices of the Holocaust Documentation and Education Center, Incorporated. The purpose of this interview is to add to the oral history of the Holocaust, so that through this living memorial future generations will know what happened. With this knowledge we hope to prevent any such occurrence in the future.

All right, Mr. Berkovitz, I'd like to ask you where you were born and the date of your birth. I was born in Maramures Sighet 1913, September 24.

You said Maramures Sighet. Can you spell that, please?

I'll write it down for you, easier than spelling it.

Well, would you spell it out while you write it? M-A-R-A-M-U-R-E-S Sighet, S-I-G-H-E-T. Sighet.

OK. And that Maramures is the province actually?

Yeah, Maramures is the province. Sighet is the capital of Maramures.

About how big was the population of Sighet?

Sighet was about 24,000, 28,000. 28,000.

28,000?

Yeah.

What was the percentage of Jews that lived in Sighet?

I would say it was about 40% Jewish.

And what was the percentage of Jews?

It was about 40%.

40%.

Yeah.

It was mostly Orthodox Jewish community?

Yeah.

OK, how did-- and this was in Romania?

Yeah, it was Romania then.

At that time.

Well, when you were born it was Romania.

When I was born in Romania. In 1940 it when-- Hitler gave it to Hungary. In 1940 it was Hungary until after the war.

So it was originally Austro-Hungarian empire?

Austro-Hungarian. Yeah.

OK. Was there any industry in the town, or how did most people earn their living?

It was a fairly small, I mean light industry, like men's clothings. And there is cabinet makers. And it's a very light. Artisans.

Yeah. And it was most of them was business.

Small business.

Small business.

This was the way the Jews made their living?

Yeah.

Well, was there any other, aside from the way Jewish people made their living, was there any other industry in the town that where Jews were not involved?

I don't think so. There was a big cardboard factory. It was owned by Jews. It was under little small factories. Most of them it was Jewish owned.

Mostly small Jewish owned?

Yeah.

OK. I'd like to ask you about your family. How many children were there in your family?

Three. Two sisters and me.

Were you oldest, youngest, in the middle?

I was the youngest.

Youngest?

Yeah.

OK. And how your father make his living?

He was a butcher. He had a butcher shop. A kosher butcher shop. He died when I was young. My father passed away, I was 16 or 17 years old.

How did your mother survive that?

I supported the family.

He died when you were how old?

16. 16.

So this brings you-- you were able to work then?

Yeah.

And what kind of work did you do then?

I did. I went to school. And worked part time in a grocery store. From there I knew Elie Wiesel. I used to go from the front stores to the others. They had a grocery store. Sometimes they need something borrowed from one store to the other. I mean they didn't buy it, until they got their shipments in. And from there I know, I used to come to their house.

He was a lot younger than you.

Oh, he was a little kid. He was a little kid. He was a little kid. I mean he was-- I don't know. He was about four or five, or six years old.

But his father was a grocer?

Yeah, his father was a grocer, and his uncle was there working in the store with his mother.

How far did you go in school, since you had to start work early?

Well, I went I made seven classes.

Seven years.

Seven years. And then after I went to [NON-ENGLISH], like a night school, working, traveling. I go twice a week.

Was that any for any specialized education, or just continued--

For most of them for continuation of the education, I mean. I liked very mathematics.

Was this in a Jewish school or was that in a Romanian school?

I went in a Romanian school. Besides this, I went to cheder until I was 16 years old. I mean I started when I was three years old. I went to cheder.

But it was seven years in the Romanian school.

Yeah.

And that was how you spoke Romanian, of course.

Yeah. We went in the morning from 6 o'clock in the morning till 8 o'clock, we went to cheder. 8 o'clock till 2 o'clock we went to school. And from 2 o'clock till 8 o'clock in the evening, we went to cheder again.

Pretty busy young kids, then?

Yeah. Then I went to the yeshiva. And the fact that I learned together with now Moshe Teitelbaum. He is now the Satmar rabbi in New York. He was in Sighet. I learned with him together by example.

You were both young [NON-ENGLISH] together.

Yeah.

Let me ask you something. In the town grew up in, Sighet, what was the attitude towards Jews? How did Jews fare in that town?

It was a mixed feelings. It was some of them very anti-Semitic, very anti-Semitic. It he was some of them, they was working with the Jews together, and he was not showing it. It was anti-Semitic, in general.

Well, were there any incidents of open antisemitism that you remember?

Oh, yeah.

Can you tell me about it?

Sure, it was. I mean it was in New Year's Eve, we went to the river with the rabbi. We had a rabbi who lived right in our street called [NON-ENGLISH] rabbi. And we went there to Tashlich. And when we come back, they stoned us.

Was this every year or just--

So coincidental, I mean it was one time. The second time I mean we had already protection, young Jewish guys, well equipped, and they was going with a group and protecting everyone. And it's and you heard it all the time. I mean Jewish and Hungarians, they called him stinking Jew. We heard it all the time. And all the time it was the Jews to Palestine. It was an everyday occurrence.

You said Hungarian. Now part of the population was Hungarian?

It was Hungarian, Romanian, and it was Ukrainian too.

Was there any protection that you could get from the government, whoever, the Romanian government in terms of incidents like that?

Incidents--

I mean did the police protect you?

They did if you go before and tell them, did they give you some. It was in the years, it all depends who was the chief of police. He had one time a chief of police. He was very protective. And one time it was just like a part of them. There was a lot of programs in the years. I remember this. I was afraid to go out on the street. They was shooting people on the street. I mean it was-- they called them the Eisen Guard.

The Iron Guard.

Iron Guard.

That was Antonescu was the--

Yeah. Yeah. At that time it was in the late years. It was horrible. They was throwing out Jews from the trains.

You say late years, what?

In 1939.

'39, when the war started. I want to go back for a few years. Now in 1933, Hitler came into power in Germany. You were a young man of 20. You were 20 years old. Did you know much about-- did you know much news about Germany then? Did you get--

Not much. We didn't. I mean we heard only sporadic incidents. It wasn't too much popular.

Did it affect local conditions at all in terms of antisemitism or anything?

Not in the beginning, not in the beginning. It then really affected bad, it was already when-- and then '38, '39, '40. Then that was the worst.

In other words, towards, as the war came closer, and as Hitler came into Germany and came into Austria, Czechoslovakia, you began to feel the effects of it?

Oh, yeah. Sure, then you feel the pressure.

Did anyone that you knew or any members of your family or anyone that you knew attempt to emigrate, or try to get out, or leave, feel that?

No. The impression was that it cannot happen here. This was the Jewish impression. It cannot happen here. Even with close as they got. And in 1938, I was traveling around. I was in Austria, the day when the Anschluss was.

You were in Vienna?

In Vienna, I left at the last train. And come home, and start talking about it. Ah, it's not going to come this far.

How did you feel personally?

I feel bad-- I feel bad. I just, if I wouldn't have to support the family and have my mother and my two sisters, I would have left a long time ago.

In other words, you-- you yourself saw some of this.

Because I saw a lot of things happening. I saw in 1939, I was coming home from Czernowitz, from Bukovina and Czernowitz to Sighet. Right next to me they took a Jewish man by payos and threw him out through the window.

That was '39.

Yeah.

Who did that, the local Iron Guard?

The Iron Guard, yeah. The Iron Guard. At that time it was terrible. I could get away with it because I was young, I was looking like a Romanian, reading their paper, sitting on the trains. They didn't bother me. They thought, I'm one of theirs. I could get away with it.

Well, I was dressed as a traveling salesman.

Is that what you were doing then, traveling salesman?

No, I was in export-import.

Oh, you were doing export-import work. So you traveled around all of Europe.

The whole of Europe, I traveled around the whole Europe. When I was 20 years old, I was already out half of Europe.

But these people, the actions where they just come into a train, grab somebody--

Yeah, I mean because it was heavy traveled with Jewish. I mean it was a lot of Jews at that time with foreign currencies. They were still in the black market.

Valuta.

Valuta, yeah. And traveling back and forth to Czechoslovakia, and Bukovina, to Austria, then to Vienna. The came and it started off, and they start when the Polish army started to run, it was around then it started getting--

Well, that was after the invasion.

The invasion, yeah.

Invasion of Poland. All right. I'd like to ask you about that. You were in Sighet when the war broke out, when they started invading, the Nazis started invading Poland then?

Yeah. Yeah, I was home. If I was in Sighet, yeah, I think so. As a was matter of fact, when the Polish army started coming running from Poland through Romania.

You mean they retreated right into Romania?

The retreated, yeah, across. Because it's right at the border. I mean it's the same railroad. And when you have to go from Sighet to Bukovina, you have to cross through Poland. And if you have to go through Romania from Sighet to Satu Mare, you have to go through Czechoslovakia.

I see. But the army actually came across border.

Yeah, with the trains. I mean the train loads, one after another, running.

You saw that?

Oh, yeah. I saw. I saw. I saw that the Czech are running. And I saw the Polish running.

How did that make you feel to see that?

It was a very bad feeling. I mean it's a very frightening feeling that. It was a very frightening feeling. And then after Czechoslovakia fell, because we had the border right across, this side was Romanian, this side was Czechoslovakia, the Carpathians. We just crossed a bridge. You could cross back and forth.

Well, when they came into Romania, the Romanians had sovereignty. Did they stop? Did they have to stop and we'll just let them come through?

No, they let them go through. They let them go through. Yeah. They let them go through.

I see.

What did you do when this happened? I mean this must have been a frightening experience for you.

It was a frightening experience. It was we talked. I mean we sit down I mean in the cafe house with all these business people. I mean all you see, all the Hasidic Jews, it was all business people. Ah, it's not happening here. It's not going to come that far. And we are protected. And this was the attitude. And this was a very wrong attitude.

Even 1940, when I run away, then I run away. I had to run away. My mother, she rest in peace, she said, you go. Save your life. I'm staying here. I was born here and I want to live here.

She encouraged you to leave?

Yeah. She didn't stop me, because I had to leave. It was in 1940, and the Hungarians come in. So they cut off Maramures from the mainland. They didn't let nobody out to travel to the mainland. And I couldn't sit still. I mean I had connections in business. I mean with Budapest before I used to ship in eggs for fruit, what they didn't have. And I had connections.

They asked me, I said, no. It's one. He called me up on the telephone. One was the commissioner. In fact, he was a retired general, a Jew, from World War I.

This was in Romania?

In Budapest.

In the Hungarian army?

Yeah. And he asked me. He said, if you can now, it's easier to ship. You don't have to pay duty and everything. I mean it's you don't have to have export license anymore. I say, I got one problem. I cannot travel. I mean you couldn't travel in Hungary. They would not let Jews travel in Hungary? To the mainland, to the mainland.

First, everybody--

When you say mainland, you mean like to Budapest?

To Budapest, yeah, across the-- I mean the old borders.

Across the old border.

The old borders. So it was governed by the army. And it was they mayor was a general. And some [NON-ENGLISH], some people I know I got a travel permit. I was the only one from the city who was traveling out there.

And this was when? In 1940?

1940, yeah. 1940, in September.

In September of 1940?

Yeah.

That was a year-- in other words a year after the Germans invaded Poland?

Poland, then it's Poland-- then they--

They had given this section to--

Given this section to Hungary, Yeah. And I was going out. Then it got me. Then got it got me. When I first, I traveled, I went to it was big farms, cities. And I went out on that market, weekly market. It was a weekly market. They come together from all the raions, from all the little--

This was within Hungary?

Then in Hungary. That was the occupied territory. I mean they called it the liberated territory. And I had a travel permit from the generals in the army command. And I come towards city, they called then Somcuta. It's called today too. And I bought some, went to the market, and bought all day what was available, and packed and I shipped them.

The following week I come back. I'm staying in the market. And I feel somebody taps me on the back. I turned around. It was this gendarme, the Hungarian gendarme. They was like what should I tell you? Like Romania, they call the Securitatii. Everybody was afraid for him. This way it was the gendarmes. If you see one gendarme, they had the big feathers. You run. You hide. They tapped my back.

I said, what? Where are you from? From Sighet. What are you doing here? I said, I'm buying eggs and shipping it to Budapest. Do you have a permit? I take out this. He looks on me. and said, things like that we don't give for Jewish people. For a Jew.

You speak Hungarian too?

Yeah, yeah. I speak seven languages. And he looked on me. He said, this is a forged document. It's impossible that an army man from the Hungarian army should issue one for Jews something like that.

I said, why don't you call up and find out? He took me in interrogation. They hold me there for two hours. One of them come in. He said, we send you right away in a labor camp, threatened me. So finally, they find out that it's legit. That they give me two hours to leave the city. And they told me if you come back, you never see the light again.

So I went to another city, next city there. I made my quota what I had. And I went up to Budapest. And I talked to this guy. He said, yeah. It's problems, my commissioner. It's a problem. And nothing I can do. I'll try.

The second time I bought a car load of apples in [NON-ENGLISH]. That's another town, one of the biggest cities. And I went to the railroad manager to give me a a car to transport. Not for Jew, not for a Jew. I'm staying three days, staying the apples there on the ramp packed in boxes. I couldn't get a cart. So I called Budapest. The guy intervened there, and so we got it. This was my last-- I went to Budapest. They come--

You mean they were looking for a bribe or somebody was bribed, it must have been?

No. It just was hard for a Jew, I mean a matter of fact, they revoked all the licenses end of 1940, they revoked all the licenses from the cities whoever just had a doubt that is not red blooded Hungarian born, some of them come from Poland. And they got their citizenships and they revoked all their licenses.

I went to Budapest. And this was in November already. 1940 November. And I didn't have what to do. So I went, always we went to see the change in the guards by the palace there. There was already SS, [NON-ENGLISH], SS officers. Matter of fact, I'm 100% sure that Eichmann was there too. But later on--

This was in 1942.

No, 1940.

1940.

1940.

That early?

That right, away when.

When you say there were SS, were they in uniform?

Yes SS uniform. SS uniform. Then I said, OK, this is the end of it. If they are already here, we are Hungarian what can we wait? I come home and talk to my mother then. Then she told me, do what you think is best for you. I still have to go back to Budapest a couple of times to collect the money. And I have a friend, he lives in Winnipeg, Shimon, And I told



him, Moshe, it's no good.

Something have to be done, or where can we do? Meanwhile, the second time I come back, I find already a recruiting paper to the labor camps. Because from the occupied territories to the liberated territories, what you called it, they didn't take anybody into the labor camps yet. They took them come from the Carpathian, and all the also from inside Hungary already. They brought down young Jews to work on the roads, making the roads, and trenches, and everything. They was--

These were labor battalions?

Labor battalions. When I saw I got mine, I got mine for January the 15th to go. I said, I'm not going to go. Or I'll die or I'm not going to go. I went back again to Budapest, collected all the money, come back and talk to my friend. I said, Morris, we have to leave. So where? I said, we got big mountains. If we make it through Russia, we go to Bukovina, from there back to other side to Romania. Fine, otherwise what happened, happened. At least I can't take this.

And he agreed with me. That I'll go. I start looking for a guide. Because the Carpathian Mountains, they are very dangerous, especially in December already, snow already. So I find a-- what do you call them? The mountaineers. I find one from [NON-ENGLISH], If he'll take us to the Russian border. We thought we'd come into Poland. This was already occupied Poland.

Eastern Poland was Russian occupied?

Yeah. I thought we'll come there. And maybe we'll sneak by. We'll go and to Bukovina Czernowitz. That mean also Russia then was already. And from there we can go over by Belz to Romania. Maybe, at least--

That portion is east near the Black Sea?

Yeah. No, it's not by the Black Sea. It's over by the Carpathians.

Oh, by the--

Yeah. By the Carpathians.

I'd like to interrupt you for a moment. What were conditions like by this time in your hometown, in Sighet? Your family was there in terms of food or anything, was there a change already?

It was no change. It was no big changes. It was no big changes. I mean in food, it's still in 1940 at least we didn't feel it. We didn't feel it. There was no much of a difference.

But you felt the personal safety.

Personal safety, the pressure, the pressure, the fear, the fear. It was a very dark cloud over our head. And I find this guy, that guide, and paid him. And I went back to Budapest, and collected the rest of the money, left it for mother. Give it. I say, here you got. What will be will be.

And I have already older sister got married. Husband this wasn't, still I mean he didn't want to leave. I mean he didn't want to go nowhere. So I come back. I have arranged. I come back the 4th of December. I'll be back, 12 o'clock from Budapest. In the evening, we'll take another train. I'm not going to waste time.

In the meanwhile, already groups, young Jewish kids coming from Bucharest. I mean in Bucharest they considered them Hungarians. They shipped them out back home to Sighet and in the provinces. And all of them start to go. Where you going? To Russia. Groups.

I had a friend of mine. He was in Bucharest. He'd come back about a week before. And he asked me. He said, I got

shoes that is very light shoes to go to the mountains. I went back in the back of the cafe house. Took off my-- I had some ski boots, and took them off. I said, give me yours. Here you got them. A week later, I had to go. I got another friend who lives in Montreal. I told him, Eugene, I need a pair of boots. I haven't got time. He gave me his boots. With this I left.

They are alive. They are safe. She was in Auschwitz. It's a long story from them too. It's not-- and we come back. We took the train. We went to [NON-ENGLISH]. Next morning, was December the 4th. We start off. It starts snowing. And the two of us, we go. It was ready about 1:00, 1:30 in the daytime. The guide, he was on a peak, 3,000 feet. He says, from there down, you go down with the valley. And there you are by the border. I cannot go farther. And he left us. This was the border with Poland?

With Russia.

With the Russian?

Yeah. Before it was Poland.

Yeah. But now it's Russian occupied?

Yeah, Russian occupied.

Did you know anything about the system in the Soviet Union at that time?

Oh, we know the system.

But you felt it was the lesser of two evils?

Right. This is the lesser of two evils. And I had already some knowledge from Dachau from before. A friend from Vienna, he was deported to Dachau, and then he ran away, come to Romania. He went to Galati, and left to Cyprus.

You mean he told you. He gave you accounts. He told you what went on.

Yeah, I mean we had already. I mean, we didn't know that the gas chambers then, nor the camps already.

Did people believe this man?

I believed him.

You believed him.

I believed him because I know the guy. I mean I used to live in his house when he lived in Vienna. And he left us in the mountains, snow and snow, and we start to go, and it start to getting dark, and we got lost. We got lost on the mountain. We were sitting around the same place.

We didn't have no choice. Finally we spotted on top of the mountain, we spotted a little house, a little summer house for the hunters. So we went in there. It was cold. It was about three feet of snow, in some places even more. And we went in. We brought in some branches from trees, and light a fire. We were so tired. We fall asleep. All of a sudden, I just feel the smoke.

I woke up. My friend, my pants already was caught on fire, it was burning. So we come up. Just tied up my pants, and we got out. Where we go? We have to try to go. We come on the mountain, top of the mountain, start to get a little bit light. We saw in the valley, I'll never forget this. I heard the wolves.

He start crying. What's that? I said, Morris, don't worry. We'll get out. We start to go. And it was already 1 o'clock, and

we didn't have no food either. I mean, we just took for one day. I mean we said in the evening we'll be there. I told him, Morris, one thing I remember. My mother used to tell me. In the the mountains, if you get lost, look for a little river for a valley, what goes down. And that valley you'll go. You'll find our big river. When you got a big river, you're somewhere already.

And that's what. We started going. Snow was. He fell in the snow I pulled him out. I fell. He pulled me out. He was-- we wish already somebody would come and catch us, even the Hungarians.

Were you dressed for that cold, for that kind of?

Yeah, he was. I mean because it was-- Sighet was cold too. And we started going with that valley down. And got wet, the ice was on our feet like that. We walked and walked and walked and walked. Finally, we come on down to the river. The river was frozen. I was afraid to cross it. It break the ice. We have no choice. We broke up from a branch a big stick, and we start opened the ice before first, and we crossed the river. When we crossed the river. It was already start to get a little bit dark.

Then I saw already tracks, horses. I said, Morris, we got civilization. We are saved, whatever happen. It took about 10 minutes. We walked on that road. All of a sudden, two Russian soldiers went [NON-ENGLISH]. Right away, they got everything what we had. I mean we had a flashlight. He was afraid to touch it. He thought it's a bomb. He took our watch, everything. We had money.

You took money too?

Whatever we had they cleaned us out. And set us down. We was frozen there. And they sit us down on the floor, on a rock. He got two shots in the air. He asked for help. And they start right away. [NON-ENGLISH] as I say, it's the spy. I say, no, we are Jewish. As much as we could, we are Jewish. We run away from Hitler. So arrived two officers, lieutenants in that rank on horseback. And they took us, just ask us whatever you could to ask them. And they couldn't understand us. And I couldn't understand them.

And they just put it in front. It was they tried to put it in front walk, and they behind us. We was walking in front of the horses. We almost fell apart on our feet. So it was pitch dark already, around 8 o'clock they got us up to a little house, where there's a guard post.

They brought us in there. Then they brought up [ROMANIAN]. You know Rumanisch?

Oh, you mean an interpreter.

Yeah, for what is in Russian interpreter.

OK. And he was from Bessarabia, also from the occupied territories. And he knew Romanian. And he started talking to us. We told him. So they didn't do much. So they give us some hot soup. And I have to put my feet in water, it took two of the guys to be able to take the shoes off. And they give us a couple of their belts, that big Russian coats, with the lamb.

Fur coats.

Fur coats. And the covered us up to go to sleep. In the morning they start us in interrogation again and again. Army installations and that, I don't know nothing. I'm not-- we just tried to save our lives. They kept us there for 24 hours. And they put us on a truck. And send us over to Nadvorna. There were that the counter-espionage headquarters. And that is they took us first upstairs, asked us a few questions. And then they took us down in the basement.

Opened up a door and throw us in. Young people with beards, I didn't recognize. The guy who I give him my shoes was there. I didn't recognize him.

Why didn't you-- I mean it was so long--

I mean those beards, all they didn't shave, dirty. And dark, just a little lamp was. You hardly could see. And finally we cooled off. I mean and started who are you? Who are you? They recognized me.

Because you were still healthy.

Yeah. Anton, what are you doing here? When you come, with who? They know us good. And some of them we didn't know. They was from the Carpathians, and we didn't know that. They was running from all over.

And there was no place to sleep. It was a room like this. There was about 60 people in it, rats like that jumping on your heads. They give you a piece of bread, and that's it for the first day. The second day, they start in the night. They woke you up. Interrogation. First me, and then my friend, then me again, then him again. It was going on for three days.

What were you looking for? To see whether you--

Yeah, if I know something. So they didn't-- after three days they closed the interrogation. And I asked, how long was there? A few days, and then they let you free. And we was there-- we was lucky. We was six days only there in that basement. The rest was some of them, four weeks, five weeks. Dirty, no sanitation, same clothes you sleep and go work in.

Next morning, they come. Who wants to go to work? Come and work, just to get out in fresh air my friend with me. We're cutting wood, sawing wood for fire. And then they gave us an extra bread for doing the work. We was lucky. And six days later, they start bringing army trucks, covered trucks. And we wasn't only the only room there. There was about 400 people in that basement.

And we ask, where are we going? Nobody knows. They took us to Stanislav.

By truck?

By truck.

How long was that trip?

The trip, about 12 hours, 10, 12 hours. Who got a watch? Who knows the time. You just know it was already in the evening, early in the morning till the evening. We arrived at Stanislav Prison. Stanislav Prison. They took us in the prison. And they processed us. They start throwing us in there. In that prison was already Polish former officers, government employees. It was full.

They threw us in a room. You didn't have no breathing room. Nothing, just a bare floor. There you sleep. I mean we went to sleep. We have to lay down one with not face to face, just like herring.

Head to foot.

Head to foot, and not head to foot. I mean your backs, that you're able to make room for everybody. In the night, you have to go to the bathroom, they had a bathroom I mean a facility inside. If you want to get up, everybody have to get up to make room to cross. If not, you have to walk on each other. In the morning they brought in a soup. It was fish, boiled fish with the bones, with everything.

No spoons, nothing just a little can, one to ten eat, like worse for animals. They treated us worse like animals. We was there until the beginning-- of June or May. I don't know exactly. I think it was May. I think it was in May.

In May, they took us from there on the evening. They got us out from there, lined us up on this stretch. Every five people had a soldier by that with a dog. And they marched us out almost a half a night. We walked until we got to the

station, the train station. Then they loaded us in cattle cars, like animals. Also, they just pushed in as much as they could.

And they shipped us out to Ukraine, a camp. It was Starobel'sk.

In the Ukraine?

In Ukraine. It was Starobel'sk. There was already thousands of people in that concentration camp, it was thousands of people. They had to push the tenants to separate, the women who. There was women. My wife was there too at the same time. I didn't know it then. That was girls, they recruit him in to the Red Cross, by the labor battalions. And they was afraid. They start running.

Just word got out. Russia's the haven. The safe place. And we was in that barracks four weeks. A lot of people sold everything off of their shirt, hungry. Food was a minimal. And the guards who was watching us, they was buying it, was buying the clothes off the guys. But there was nothing you had, because they stole everything when they arrested you.

Yeah, just the clothes off you. That's what they sold. That's what they sold. Some people, after that, when they shipped that out from there just had a plain blanket, wrapped around self, and underwear. That's all they had left. This was mostly intellectuals. It was more intellectuals. They couldn't stand the hunger. And they sold everything off of them. It was a very ugly scene.

This is end of side a, tape one, Paul Kaufmann interviewing Mr. Anton Berkovitz.

Paul Kaufmann interviewing Mr. Anton Berkovitz.

So they lined you up into freight cars?

Into freight cars, yeah. Cattle cars. Freight cars, and shipped us out to Starobel'sk And there we was in Starobel'sk.

About a month.

About a month, yeah. And after that they feel already the German invasion I mean getting close in 1941.

It was in June, or the beginning of June.

Yeah. And this was the end of May. This was already they had already concentration army. So they want to take us--

Far away.

Far away. You say you think that they knew that the Germans were going to invade. Was there any evidence of that that you heard? Or it was just rumors?

This was rumors was. I mean it's-- we didn't have much contact with nobody. I mean if there were anything really knowledge. And then they took us from Starobel'sk again in freight cars. And there was about 3,000 people in that transport. And we just was going day and night. Days after days, days after days, we didn't know where. Finally, they gathered in the outskirts of Moscow. And on the railroads, parked there.

And here was coming others trains. This was coming from Lithuania already, also prisoners, what they had from Estonia, Lithuania, from other camps. And we met-- and through the little windows, they just told us that Germany invaded Russia.

Russian soldiers?

That was Lithuanian then.

Oh, they told you?

Yeah. They told us. I mean screaming over and saying, they was prisoners and he was prisoners. I mean it was trains, and trains, and trains. I mean you could see out the window, see another lane. You see this way--

You were just packed into these cars.

Cars, yeah.

How many days was that you were traveling?

14 days.

14 days. Until he got to the North Pole. And food, was a little pumpernickel for four people. And salted little herring. You called in Russian [NON-ENGLISH]. It's like that big they are, that's all, no water. It was the third day. It was dying for water. After we left already Moscow, from the station out, we didn't know where we are. They told us that we are in Moscow station.

Nobody said anything. And you couldn't ask a guard. He tells you in Russian, go fly a kite. They didn't talk. And we were so guarded that it was on top of the roof.

The guards were on top of the roof?

On top of the roof, yeah. Most of it was traveling in the nights then already.

In the days you didn't travel?

Most of the time already after Moscow, we traveled only at night. The days--

They just stopped the train.

They stopped the train and-- and water. We couldn't have any. Everybody was fall asleep. I couldn't fall asleep. In the middle of the night, I heard the guard. He takes-- there two little buckets, that big for 60 people water. He opened the door and pulled the two buckets out. So all right. We'll have water. I was sitting right by the door. I'll be the first one.

And I heard him. I thought it's water right there. Meanwhile it was I call it dirty water. I mean it's with sand and mud. He pushed in the two buckets of water. I grabbed have the first. How do you think? It's dark. You put in head. You drink like an animal. And somebody hurt the noise from the waters. Everybody starts waking up and start almost killed each other. Nobody drank it, because everybody was dragging it. And it was just pouring out. So next morning, finally, they brought some cold tea in and they give up a big tea. Everybody got a sip, and wash that salt off of it.

We traveled. We traveled. We didn't know where we're going. Finally, we arrived to a station. It's called Kotlas. It's right past Kirov, Gorky, it's all the way to the North Pole already. That's already the first.

You knew you were going north though.

We didn't know.

You didn't even know you were going north?

We didn't know where we're going. We didn't have no idea where we go. We go north or we go [? east. ?] We arrived to Kotlas. It was end of June. It was already 1st of July, I think so, the 2nd. And with got in Kotlas. They disembarked us, and put us in a small like they bring the logs down from the mountains, in little open trains. And sit us down in them

open trains, with not so many guards already, just three on one end, and three on the other end. We go.

We feel that it's again cool.

It's July, but it's cool.

It's July. It was already. We traveled all day long. We arrived to [NON-ENGLISH]. This already--

Was this forest, or were there towns, or anything, or mostly through forests?

Through forests.

Through forests.

No towns.

No towns.

There is already through forest. And we arrived to a place, a port, called [NON-ENGLISH]. This already right on the [NON-ENGLISH], this already on the North Pole, the beginning of the North Pole, the edge, in the Arctics. And they took the women off, dropped them off there in [NON-ENGLISH]. And they went with us further.

We arrived. I think it was [NON-ENGLISH]. We arrived there. There they disembarked us, by the river. We didn't eat all day. That day they didn't give us nothing. We arrived there and we start asking the guards. Some of them know. I mean they was from the Carpathians. They know Ukraine. They talk. And they could understand, because already we was all together, one bunch.

In our group was about 1,200, 1,400 people. And they said we'll cook a meal here, and we'll get water meals. It took all day long. They boiled wheat, whole wheat, boiled it. And they had little buckets. Six people a little bucket hot wheat, and the hand out some wooden spoons. I got sick. I eat that hot-- and I start throwing up. I got sick. So it didn't do any good. There was no doctor, nothing, live or die. Don't make a difference.

And there is already the day, it's already 24-hour daylight in the summer. We didn't know. A day was so long. And the sun don't go down. Midnight, when you see the sun going down, going down and going down. In a half an hour later, it started coming up again. But it was past midnight already.

Finally, they pulled up a couple of barges, things, open freight barges, and they start loading us in that barges. We traveled all night. I mean it's already in the morning till they got us loaded in and start off, all day, the following day. And mosquitoes was eating you up alive. I got bitten by a mosquito, my foot swell up like this, my right foot. Nothing to do. There's nobody to complain nobody or ask for something.

So next day, around 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock we arrived. It was already-- it's already snow on the mountains there. You see the big snow. I mean we was there already on the North Pole. And from there they took us with little-- they didn't have no trains, with trucks. They had a little train, they could put 100 people on it. And the rest of them walked. We walked, went by train, by truck. We got into the city. The city at that time, it wasn't today it's a big city already. Vorkuta.

Vorkuta.

You heard about it?

Yeah. Tell me along this train, now this is you've been on the road a month or more.

Yeah.

One thing or another.

Sanitation?

Well, sanitation must have been horrendous.

Lice.

Did many people give up in this? Did people die? Were there are many people--

No, I don't think so on the road there was any. It was only one person died in the car. It was an elderly person. They had a heart attack. At that time, we didn't know what is. I mean it was elderly people too. I mean it's not only youngsters. It was families with small children. They took the children away from him. They separated children. They never saw the children again. They separated husband and wife. If they know you married, you didn't go even in the same transport.

How did people treat each other? I'm talking about the people, the prisoners.

People was fine. I mean people.

Well I mean, was there any attempt at cooperation of people together and any--

Yeah, I mean we was sitting, I mean we made chess, from the bread. I didn't eat for three days bread. I made a chess from it.

Chess set?

Chess set, yeah. And my friend took up his socks, took out the thread. And he was a tailor. And he designed a board on a handkerchief. And we know somewhere we'll get will get better. And we didn't have no choice already. Running away you can't.

Well, what you're saying then is you weren't discouraged. You felt that--

No.

--it could only get better from that point.

Right. I myself never was discouraged in the worst of times. I always said I'll live it through and I'll fight it through. And this helped a lot. We arrived to Vorkuta. They had some tents, barracks. I mean it was in July. And the night was cold. I mean it was-- they had a coal mine there, one of the biggest coal mines in Russia. And we had enough coal to heat.

And they put in the barracks, and there we had already a warm soup. And it was already, they took us next day for the disinfection, baths, showers. The clothes was disinfected. I mean it feels already half human.

How did the guards-- how did the guards behave, the Russian guards? I mean were they--

They was rough. They was. [NON-ENGLISH]

I mean if you know this Russian word.

Gimme, gimme, gimme--

Go, go, go, go, go. Just go, go, go. I mean it's like a dog. I mean we didn't have much contact with them because we went in a group. If you it's the same thing if you couldn't walk. That with this rifle, we butt you. I mean it was a lot of



older people. I mean we had to help them. I mean we take them under the arm and drag them, I mean the few miles. But we had to walk wasn't that far. So we arrived to Vorkuta. They put us in barracks.

The barracks was heated. And it was summer. I mean their summer, there, July, August. August, we went out to work. Put us out to work, whatever work, just to work.

What kind of work did you do?

I did at the beginning, I worked outside to load trucks. Because the coal mines, and they had a lot of coal burned up, I mean, they didn't have no transportation to get the coals out. And they burned up for themselves, millions of tons of coals. So we have to load that burned up coal, because we got a shell from it. It was like cement left from that coal. We loaded that on trucks, and they start to build roads from that.

The ash?

This ash. I mean it was hard, because that coal is different than coal is like here we have, or somewhere else. That's a different coal. It was like a rock.

Like glass.

Like a rock.

That's got a lot of oil in them. And it burned until the oil burned out. And the rest was a piece of rock.

Clinker, we call that.

And I worked that. I worked the night shift. I didn't work long. I worked only about a few days, because my foot was swollen. There we had already an infirmary. And went to doctor, they had a couple Jewish doctors, Russian, from Leningrad to this. That was before it was a political camp, all Stalin's foes, he sent him out there. Who he didn't kill, he sent him out there. It was generals, his own friends was in that camp there.

So they were mixed together with-- you were all mixed together then?

Yeah, yeah. We mixed together.

Political prisoners, Jews, foreigners, Romanians.

Everything, hooligans, all--

Criminals also.

Also it was. It was a mixed camp. And so my foot swelled up, and I tried to keep it swollen. I saw it keeps me out from work. I tried to keep it on. What I did, I went up in the morning. They had the beds that-- I don't know how to call it? In-

-

Bunks.

Bunks. I mean it's just one, really long--

Big platform.

--platform. Two platforms on the top, one on bottom. I slept on top. And in the morning, I got up early and everybody just sit down on the bunk and got my foot hanging down. It swelled up here like that. And they come in to get you to work I showed them for the foreman. They said, you go to the infirmary. This was every day for almost a year.

What I did in the daytime, I run to the kitchen. I help out in the kitchen. I got some extra food. And my friends, we got a few friends from the home together. And I bring in a couple buckets of soups with whatever it was extra food, and it worked out well.

After that, they send me out to work. They find out that he can help it. They send me away for four weeks in a hospital where I couldn't do that. Then it went down. So I come back. They said, I'm able to work. So if I have to work, I'll work.

And I worked outside and then down come the winter. It was terrible. The winter, they have to pull the ropes from the barracks to the mess hall. So if you go with without holding on to the rope, the wind blows your away in the snow, and it was snow like-- like if you see the expeditions. If you saw that. That's the weather we had there.

60, 70 below zero weather, winds 120, 140 miles an hour.

Hurricane all the time.

All the time, most of the time. They heated in the barracks. I mean I had a guy from our city, a young guy, he slept right by the end on the platform. He froze to death with the heater. It was warm inside. From outside he was living right by the tent. It was a tent around then. And then later on, they start to build a wooden barracks, better ones.

And we worked. I say, if I have to work, I'll work. I mean I'll live it through. It was then people start to fall like flies, intellectuals. The work, some of them didn't want to go to work. If you didn't work, they put you in isolation. They don't feed you, just once a day a can of soup it was. And they was going eating all the garbage what they find, I it was terrible. I mean lawyers, doctors, they was the first to go.

And in 1940, this was already '42, when the big push was by Stalingrad. They brought in all the Volga Germans, brought out some of them about, 400 or 500 Volga Germans. And put them in a separate camp. In the camp, they made another camp, like an isolation. They took all the Jews out and threw them in with the Germans. Threw this and all, that they was intellectuals. they was very, very fine people, was most intellectuals. And we went to work with them.

What kind of work did you do then at that time? What were you doing?

It's the same thing.

Loading trucks.

Loading trucks.

Labor.

Labor, labor, and trying to make a trench or something. You have to dig with a chisel.

Because of the ice.

Yeah, it was frozen I mean the earth was there frozen year round. Nothing grows there. It's all the tundras, the tundras. As soon as you take off the tundra, it's got that thick--

Frozen soil.

Not the soil it, had like like a-- oh, we got it here too when you take off the first soil.

Oh. The subsoil.

Yeah. You take this off, it's a piece of ice. And they have to make some-- they want to build something. You just chisel

it. We chiseled in such pieces.

Like you were chiseling stone out.

Right, such pieces like that with in eight hours, probably you make a hole, like a quarter of a table, in eight hours. That was free labor. Then in 1940-- end of 1942, they went. They took all the Germans. All that was who was between them. And they want to send them away to further north. They had a mine where they made paint of it. I mean white--

Titanium?

Yeah, that rock, white rock.

Probably titanium.

It's a white rock. I mean it used to be in Europe used to be. Here I never saw it. You just put it in water, and it boils. It boils off from himself and it gets like a white paint. And that is, from there whoever goes there, just never comes home with a healthy lungs. Their lungs are all eaten up.

So they put us, already they called us out, roll call. You guys go all there. I don't know. Was it my luck or was-- a courier come, and called out two names from the whole group. It was a friend of mine who lives in New York, [NON-ENGLISH]. He's a lawyer, and me.

The commandant from the camp want to see you. He took us in there. The whole group left. The commandant was a lady. She was a captain rank, NKVD, captain rank. She called us in. She said, you guys was excellent workers all the time, didn't have no complaints. You always have a good report. I don't want you to go there. I want you to stay here.

If you want to go down work in the coal mine, I would appreciate it. We need people in the coal mine. I say, yeah. Better I'm working-- I didn't know what's waiting there. And there I come down. They send me to coal mine. I met an engineer from Leningrad. He was a Komsomol. I start to go on the front. He volunteered to work in the coal mine. But that coal mine, nobody wanted to work there. I mean who had a choice that they needed some professionals, coal miners, or the prisoner they couldn't do much. He could do the hard labor or the special thing what they had to do.

So finally, he went down working in the coal mine. And I wind up working shoulder to shoulder with him. I worked with him a few days, he called me on the side. He said, Antosha, they called me Antosha, Anton, they called me there Antosha. That I never see a Jewish guy to work so from hearts. But that you will stay with me, that you will work with me all the time. He started to bring him in cigarettes from outside. But he lived outside to me. He was--

Free.

He was free. He was a volunteer in the Komsomols. And he started bringing me bread. He said, I'll teach you something that you don't have to work with a shovel all day. I'll teach you how to shot coals, I mine, to mine the coals. I said, you do it and you three four hours free. You can sit and sleep. And he taught me. He learned me this. And I start to drill holes, put dynamite in.

And he took him out. He becomes engineer of the coal mine, main engineer.

He was this Komsomol.

Yeah. He there. But a week later, I got in an accident. I went in too soon after exploded. I went too soon in, and it's covered me. I was lucky. I was covered up like sitting under the table.

Covered up with coal and rocks.

Oh, yeah. They couldn't find me. They couldn't find me, the rocks. Filler up, two rocks fell down right next to me, and

one of them on top I was sitting right under the table. And the small stuff covered me up. Now the gas was too [INAUDIBLE]. They called down from the-- what do you call it? [NON-ENGLISH], how to call and say. If an accident, like--

You mean like the medics?

Medics that they are trained--

Rescue, rescue.

Rescue, yeah, the rescue squad. They come down. I can hear them talking. But they didn't see me. I was laying under a pile of ton of coal. And one of them sat down. And they said, we don't have no choice. It's too big rocks. And so let's put it in a dynamite, and we'll be able to clear it out. Then they said no. Let's try to find him. They know I'm there.

And they start shoveling up the small coal, and one of them hit my foot with the shovel. And I screamed. He said, I got him. I was already, hardly the gas, was I was already gassed. They dragged me out, took me down. They took me down in the hospital. I was about four weeks in the hospital. And they did give me a good treatment. They washed my stomach with milk or whatever it was. And that Komsomol engineer come to see me. He said, you're not going to go down in the coal mine anymore. He said, I'll get you something.

There was a canteen on the premises for the free miners. I mean rationed, they got food. He asked me if I knew anything about business. I say, well, this was my beginning, my childhood. I worked in a grocery store for years. He told me, so listen, I know you are foreigner. I can trust you. So you know how we live here, and live and let live. You got that job.

I was a prisoner, I was. And he say, and I'll make arrangement that you're not going to go into the camp. You sleep here in the [INAUDIBLE]. There was another Jewish guy, from Kyiv. He was a political prisoner. He was a very religious guy, Shama. And he was already about eight years in that camp. And he worked himself up to it. He became from the magazine, from the warehouse where they have the clothes for the miners, for the free miners, the heavy fur coats and it's like the Russian army.

He was in control of that. And we got together. And we built a little cabin. And there he let us do it. And we lived there. I never went back.

This Komsomol was not Jewish though?

No. No. He was Russian.

But he was a-- he was an active communist as a Komsomol.

Yeah. Sure.

What was his attitude towards the political prisoners? He didn't care about that, as long as long as you were--

As long as you leave me alone, I don't have nothing with you. And a lot of the political prisoners, I mean the intellectuals, the bigger ones, they all got out from the camps, got jobs in the city. And I mean they all was working with a propusk, lived outside already. And he said, I'll arrange you stay here. You don't have to go anywhere.

And I was-- I worked there. I had to do. I have to steal and do anything to support him and support other ones too. Everyone was coming with open hands, give. You can do it. So I did it. It was no-- and then I lived already good. I got dressed good. I'll show you afterward pictures. And then I was walking one day. I was walking down on the corridor there. There was a Jewish lady, Zoia Mikhailovna. Her husband was a general.

And she don't know. They took him away one day, and sent her one camp, him somewhere. She don't know if he was alive or not. She was there when they took off the women. She was in that camp with my wife. And one day, I was

walking the corridor. I heard, Antosha, Antosha. I said, what's the matter, Zoia Mikhailovna? Come. I'll show you. There's a girl from [NON-ENGLISH], my friend.

She come in. That's my wife. I mean I saw her. When the first, when they transported us, because it was on a barge. It was divided with like a wire. It was--

Barbed wire, you mean?

No, it's just like-- just like--

Like a fence.

A fence, like a little fence was there. And we was on this side, and they was on the other side.

Did you know her back in the town?

No, no, no. I just saw her because a couple girls from our town was there too. And they got all this, Antosha, you want a piece of bread, all this, in the few days we was traveling together. And she was the one who sticked a piece of bread. I looked down, and I asked her. I said, did you come in that and that barge with this and this. She say, yeah. I said, I think I remember you.

I looked on her. I mean she was already free then. This was already in 1945. She was already then. And this was two years I was in that position there. But I didn't have no contact with the camp. Just if once in a while, I want to go and just to say hi to the friends or take something to them, I went in. I got the guards used to take me, I used to give them a glass of vodka or something. He used to take me in the camp, wait for me and bring me back.

So you were actually at this job in the canteen for several years?

Yes. And about a year and a half I was there. And I looked on a few things. She had to boots frozen. And so I one thing, I went to this friend of mine, to Shama. I say, Shama I need some good, warm clothes. And give me a white fur coat, brand new one, with new pants. And I dressed her up. I say you go, you come every day or every second day after work. I'll give you some food.

Because what she was making then wasn't enough to pay her-- a month was enough to pay her rent what she was making. I know they were starving. I had another couple of girls, and I had some couriers there who used to send them a little milk, a loaf of bread. I do whatever I could steal. I didn't need it. I had enough to eat.

But after that at end of '45, they opened up a big magazine, like a supermarket in town already.

In Vorkuta?

In Vorkuta. And he arranged they put me in to manage that. I was a prisoner. I was a prisoner. I couldn't go nowhere without a guard. And I went there, I mean the magazine. I could do anything I want. I mean it's such a big-- I mean I had 20,000 ration cards to serve. There was a big clientele.

Yes, so there was a lot of supplies there.

Oh, yes, I mean I had everything.

I had a white flour. It was impossible to get there. Milk used to come in burlap bags, frozen. Nothing could arrive there fresh. There was nothing. Everything was conserved or dry. Potatoes was dry. And I got, one day I got a sack of white flour they send me in for the NKVD, he says. And I had there a friend, Shalinsky from Germany, from Berlin. He was already free. How they freed him?

I mean they were freed, but they had to stay in the North?

They didn't let you go out. You couldn't go nowhere.

You could be a free person though.

They didn't give you papers, just to stay in there. And that's it was like an island, just an island around with the [NON-ENGLISH], the waters and the tundras. 1,000 kilometers of tundras.

And then find their own way to shelter and buy food. And they were on their own.

Yeah. They're on their own. I mean they give them jobs. I mean they give them a job. But their job was not enough to support themselves. So that Shalinsky used to go on the black market, on the market. So I give him some flour to go sell it, make a few bucks. I'll take half of it, and you take half of it. And then [NON-ENGLISH] militia went on the side, and caught him. Asked him where you got it. Antosha.

By that time, I was a popular name already in the little town. Antosha, everybody knows Antosha, from the NKVD to the [NON-ENGLISH], to the guy who runs. And he comes into me and says, Antosha, did you give him flour. I say, yeah. He was selling it on the black market. So where is the flour? I got it. Come on.

I went to the back room give him a big chunk of butter, and say go home and give your wife to bake cookies. Bring me some. This was the--

The end of the--

The end of this. I mean I wasn't afraid for nothing. I was doing well. One day, I figured, I'll go out. She lived with a girlfriend in an apartment. I said, I'll go to spend there an evening, a day, Sunday, with them together. And I had once by the guard, I was dressed good, like any free miner. When they went out there in there, I walked out. He saw me. He didn't-- I walked over there. In town, nobody bothered me.

The next day, I had to come back. I called up the guard to see if he is there. And it was misleading. One of them answered the phone and said, yes. Come in. He knows I'm outside. When I got there, he put me [NON-ENGLISH]. And they had the former commandant was a lieutenant. He used to take me into towns, dropped me off and come back two three hours later and pick me up. Because spirits there, 100% proof vodka was there diamonds. Nobody had it. I had it.

I used to give him a half a liter once a month. He would do anything I wanted to do. So they took me into the Kommandatura. And there was a new commandant, Ukrainian. He just come back from the front. He was wounded, and they sent him there. He start to raising hell. I'll send you to that mine there. I didn't say much. I asked him, I say, to smoke and I got better cigarettes than he had.

Then the other one, that lieutenant, pulled him aside and said you better make peace with him. You need him. It didn't take long. I mean he cussed me out and this. And he sent me back to my quarters. And I was there in that magazine. And then they called me for to liberate me from the camp. That they want me to take the Russian citizenship. I refused it. They threaten me. They'll take away my job. They'll send me back to camp.

I had one guy, it was the nachal'nik from the commerce department, he was a colonel, an anti-Semite. God, he must be a Ukrainian. He was an anti-Semite. With him was working a Jewish guy, Vasil'ev from Leningrad, also a prisoner, a former prisoner from Stalin. That they freed him, but they didn't let him get out of there.

And the main accountant was from Estonia, also a prisoner. He was a good accountant. They let me know all the time if something, an inventory or something, they let me know in advance. He won't catch-- he told me once, if I catch you [INAUDIBLE], I take another 10 years from you. So finally they called me out and gave me my free passport.

This was the end of the war, in '45.

Well, that was already in the end of '45. It was already the beginning of '46. It was already beginning of '46. Then already I had got together with my wife. We got married. I'll show you. I'll show our wedding, how it looks. Not ours, friends of ours in Montreal, they live. I brought them out. And I was there. And then I had a very good acquaintance.

He was prokuror, this is the attorney general from the whole raion. He asked me, he said, Antosha, do me a favor. Do yourself a favor. Get away from the job. Go in the coal mine back. But from here, nobody walked away from these jobs without going to prison. From the warehouse to the prison, not even home, because I don't want to see you there. I like you too much.

So he told you to go back to the coal mines.

Better--

From that you could get liberated from.

No. That I'm not going to fall in the prisons from there because. Everybody had to steal there. And he know what I'm doing. One of these days he'll crack, and I'll have to prosecute you. And I don't want it.

In other words, but where could you go?

Work on the coal mine, go get another job. Get another job, so that you could--

Get out from there, not to get to prison. So I was free already then. I said, don't worry about it. I can take care of myself. And meanwhile, my wife got pregnant. And I said, uh-uh, my child is not going to be born in Russia or I'll die. Not on my life. It was right in 1946 in June, July. I start to plan on something to do. I want to make it short. I want to plan it, to do something, to get away.

Run away, you cannot from there. No way. Because as soon as you get it, they had already a train from there. As soon as you get on the train, the train takes off. You got in each compartment you got four soldiers checking everybody's-- if you don't have any official papers, you're in trouble. I said, how can I do that?

So first, I cannot leave my job and run away. Finally, it dragged away until it was in December, December '46. I decided I'll take a risk. I went out to the station, and through a friend of mine, talked to the engineer, to the train engineer. I said, I'll buy tickets. I want to go to Moscow. I'll buy tickets. I have to get through this inspection, that verification. He have to hide me somewhere on the train. Two half liters vodka I took my pocket, and took a girl with me.

We have to say I'm not going for myself, I want if I go, I want all of my friends. There was 19 there. We took pictures from everybody, their date of birth. Where they was born, it didn't make a difference. I can make them born wherever I need them. If I get something by the Romanian embassy, I'll make them Romanish. With the Hungarian, I'll make them Hungarian. Went out to the train station and give them engineer, I have a little vodka, took four tickets all the way to Moscow.

This is for 20 people?

No, just two of us.

Oh, just the two of you.

Yes, two of us. Oh, God. Well you said--

No, I had-- I took the pictures

Oh, you took--

We took pictures and their dates, if I get some success to make them some papers, I'll bring them back.

Oh, you bring them back.

I had to come back. Well, I left my wife there.

So he took me and a girl, she was carrying the pictures. And--